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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000122

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E, AF/RSA, AND DRL; DRL FOR MICHEAL ORONA
AND SANDRA MURPHY; STATE ALSO PASS MCC.

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/07/2015

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL DJ

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI'S HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT--TOOL FOR
IMPROVEMENT AND DEEPER DEMOCRACY ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Pol/Econ met February 5 with the Director of Bilateral Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohamed Ali Hassan, and the Americas Desk Officer, Mohamed Omar Djama, at their request to discuss the 2004 Annual Country Report for Djibouti on Human Rights. Hassan stated that Djibouti wanted a closer cooperation with Embassy officials on Human Rights. He also commented that this request was at the behest of Djibouti's Ambassador to Washington, Robleh Olhaye. Hassan's main mission in the meeting was to share with Pol/Econ the accomplishments and efforts made by the Government to improve its human rights record and its chances of meeting Millennium Challenge criteria. Although Hassan did not present a laundry list of accomplishments, those he mentioned have already been included in Post's report for 2004. Hassan also inquired as to whether an advance copy of the report would be available.

2. (C) Pol/Econ stated that she was unable to share the 2004 report, as it has not been released, but expected publication worldwide in late February or early March based on the previous year's timetable. Pol/Econ instead offered copies of the 2003 report, in both French and English. She told Hassan that Djibouti's report had stayed relatively the same from 2003 to 2004. She mentioned areas in which no progress had been made, specifically labor and impunity of government officials. She also noted the positive steps that were listed in the report, such as the ratification of several International Labor Organization conventions on child labor. Pol/Econ also commented that many of Djibouti's advancements in Human Rights were not accompanied by enforcement of new, or existing laws. As an example, she used Djibouti's ratification of the Maputo Protocol on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) on 29 January 2005 during a regional conference on FGM hosted by Djibouti (report septel). She noted that Djibouti has an existing law criminalizing FGM, but countered that in conversations with Djiboutians, not many know it is illegal. She also noted that it is not enforced. Pol/Econ said that the FGM conference and ratification of the Maputo Protocol were steps in the right direction, but real change in the human rights situation would mandate publicizing and enforcing the Protocol.

3. (C) Hassan commented that he did not believe that the United States published these reports annually merely to condemn each country without giving feedback on the positive efforts. Hassan added that Djibouti would like to know how to use the report to improve its record. It also wants to focus, he said, on development of democracy and good governance. He continued that Embassy projects with emphasis on human rights have been good, but asked if it might not be better to focus assistance more directly on government-to-government aid. Hassan pointed out that many negative areas in the human rights report are directly affected by insufficient resources. He suggested a series of meetings to go over the report and to develop strategies to improve the human rights situation. Pol/Econ responded that she would be happy to discuss aspects of the 2003 report at any time, as well as the 2004 report once published.

4. (C) Ambassador's Comment: Post believes that the meeting with Hassan offers a prime opportunity for the Embassy to further assist Djibouti intensively in development of its human rights, as well as good governance programs. We are beginning with a Country-Team focal group meeting to identify areas of special challenge and reviewing how we might tailor programs to areas which have for many years been negative in Djibouti's human rights record. Post also feels that with specific challenge areas in mind, it can productively engage Djibouti in an open bilateral discussion of the report that may yield positive results in Djibouti's quest to meet MCA standards. We note that while projects through Democracy and Human Rights Funding (DHRF) have been beneficial and have had a positive impact on Djiboutian society, they remain small scale. With the window now wide open by President Bush and Dr. Rice, and evidence of Djiboutian readiness to improve its human rights record, the time seems ripe to consider a deeper commitment at the resource level. We will follow up with programming proposals across agency lines at Post. End Comment.
RAGSDALE